

The Robinson Diamonds

An Audacious Hazard of Nikolai, Independent Agent, as Related by His Lieutenant, Summers
By H. M. EGBERT

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This is the first of a series of stories, each complete in itself, which narrate the tremendously exciting adventures of Nikolai—a sort of modern Robin Hood who calls himself a "leveler of fortunes." The clever device by which he restored the Robinson Diamonds to their rightful owner is the subject of the present tale.

I think there must be some malign Providence that sends our enemies across our paths just when we think that we have put them out of our lives forever. How else can one account for the meeting between Sir Julius Robinson and Mary Boyd?

It happened aboard the *Lindlough*, one of the older vessels of the Atlantic passenger fleet. There were not many of us, and we soon became intimate. The man in my cabin was, I fancied, a Russian or Austrian by birth; he called himself Baron Nikolai and seemed possessed of unlimited wealth. Sir Julius Robinson and Van Aam were South African diamond magnates about to pay a visit to America in order to float some company, and after the lights were turned out in the smoking room the four of us played poker into the small hours of the morning in Sir Julius' cabin. Nikolai always won; afterward, when our association had become close, I learned that cards were one means whereby he made his living. But that is neither here nor there; if he took from the rich, he had supreme compassion for the poor. Indeed, he posed as a sort of Robin Hood, called himself, whimsically, a leveler of fortunes, and claimed his own share as middleman in these transactions.

Sir Julius and Mary Boyd met on the deck the second morning. I saw the fat man grow pale; he put one hand out to steady himself against the rail of the ship, and as the girl swept by, not deigning to notice him, he looked after her with a scowl. It was Mary herself who told me of the circumstances later.

It was a very simple story. Her father had been one of the first discoverers of diamonds in the river Vaal. Robinson and he had been partners; when Boyd fell sick of typhoid fever Robinson possessed himself of his claim through some legal chicanery. Boyd emerged from the hospital to find himself penniless. His wife died in prison not long afterward, and Mary was adopted by a poor family of the district. She educated herself, became a school teacher, fell in love with a visiting American, and was now on her way to Savannah, the terminal port of call, to marry him.

Meanwhile Robinson, grasping his stolen prize, had flourished. He became a millionaire, was knighted, and had put Mary Boyd out of his recollections.

When Nikolai heard the story his eyes blazed.

"I have learned one thing in the course of my experience, Summers," he said to me. "No man can sin and get away with it. Somehow, somewhere, Robinson will make restitution."

"Who will compel him if the courts can't?" I asked.

"I will!" he cried.

It was on that same evening that Robinson, insolent and flushed with wine, pulled from the inside of his shirt a silken cord at the end of which was hung a chamois leather bag. He tossed it on the table and opened it. A handful of brilliant pebbles tumbled out.

"Do you fellows know what these are?" he hiccupped.

"Uncut diamonds," replied Van Aam sharply. "Put them away and don't be a fool, Robinson."

"Why shouldn't I be a fool if I want to?" demanded the millionaire. "I got the coin, ain't I? Can't I be a fool if it amuses me? Yes, diamonds, gentlemen; uncut, but worth a cool half million. These are my samples, and if I can't float the biggest capitalized company in the trade on the strength of them, why I'll pitch them into the sea. No, I won't either—I'll hang them on my pretty Mary Boyd's neck for a love gift."

I longed to break his own neck. Nikolai nudged me under the table and, looking up, I saw him frown slightly. I understood the warning; I knew that he had conceived some scheme which I must not spoil by precipitate action.

"Worth a cool half million, gentlemen," went on the millionaire, gathering up his samples. "Pounds—not dollars. Sometime I'll tell you how I jumped old man Boyd's claim when he was sick. I s'pose Mary's painted one as black as Satan to you; what? Well, if I hadn't jumped his claim he'd have jumped mine. Ain't all fair in business?" He took the last stone in his hand and toyed with it thoughtfully. "I'd give this to Mary for one kiss," he mumbled, "but I know she wouldn't do it. She's bounded me for years and hates me like poison because I won't be blackmailed. She'd want more than one—two, I reckon."

"Shut up, Julie," said Van Aam, kicking me.

At a certain college it was the custom to have the students write the following pledge at the bottom of their examination papers:

"I hereby certify on my honor that I have neither given nor received aid during this examination."

Soon after handing in his paper a young fellow hurriedly entered the class room and said: "Professor, I forgot to put the pledge on my paper."

"Altogether unnecessary," replied

him. "You've had too much champagne."

The ship was rolling heavily in the trough of the sea. It was the end of the tenth day on the next we might look for land. As I turned into my cabin I fancied that I smelled smoke, but I was dog tired from the long play, and must have undressed and tumbled into bed without knowing what I was doing, for the next thing that I remembered, after turning the handle of our door, was hearing the sound of hurrying feet above us. The next minute Nikolai was shaking me by the shoulder.

"Wake up," he cried. "The ship's afloat."

I sprang to my feet in panic, and as I did so I heard confused cries and shouting outside; then screams of women awakened from sleep by that most dreadful of sea tragedies. As I opened the door a cloud of acrid smoke rushed in. Nikolai closed the door and restrained me with one hand.

"Take your time, Summers," he said. "It's still below decks; there's plenty of time. They aren't even getting out the lifeboats yet."

I dressed in a hurry, threw my overcoat over me and hastened out with my companion. We had to fight our way through the smoke, and the floors were noticeably warm beneath our feet. On the deck I cannoned into Sir Julius.

"What shall I do?" he whimpered, clutching at my arm, and I saw that his face was gray with fear. "The ship's afloat. We shall all be drowned."

"There's plenty of water to put it out," said Nikolai sardonically, looking down at the heaving sea. "By the way, where are those diamonds, Robinson?"

"They're here," gasped the millionaire, placing one pudgy hand upon his breast. "I'll give you all if you will save my life." He had nothing over his palamas but a long mackintosh, covering him from throat to knees, and carpet slippers. At his side stood Van Aam, perfectly cool and collected, smoking a cigar. He was as spruce as though he had just dressed for dinner. All around us women were huddled upon the deck; beneath us the steerage passengers kept up a constant outcry. The officers were guarding the lifeboats—which were being provisioned. From the afterhatch a dense black cloud rolled up.

"Your first visit to the States?" said Van Aam to me, coolly. "Yes? You'll enjoy these parts. I own an interest in a summer hotel on one of the Georgian islands. We can't be far from shore. Look at Sir Julius!"

"I thought you were a South African," I said.

"Am," he answered. "But I've spent several summers in America of late, and Sir Julius is coming for the first time under my escort. By Jove, look at Miss Boyd!"

I saw Mary Boyd descending the gangway. She was completely dressed, and, save that her hair was unfastened, she might have been preparing to go ashore at port. As she passed us, calm enough in the face of the ever increasing danger, I heard Nikolai say to the millionaire:

"You will give all your diamonds if I save your life?"

"Yes, yes," cried the millionaire, who was leaning with a sea-sick expression, against the rail, enviously watching the nearest lifeboat. "How can you do it? Can't you get me a special lifeboat, with a crew, and come with me? We four—me and my man. Surely the captain will do that for me."

Nikolai took him by the shoulder and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat.

"You hound!" he roared. "Do you want to leave the rest to perish? Do you think a man will enter the boats before the women are safe?"

"Why shouldn't I be a fool if I want to?" he continued, more kindly. "Our chances are desperate ones. Do a just act before you die; restore those diamonds to Miss Boyd."

I looked round. Mary was standing quietly beside me.

"But how do you know we won't be saved after all?" asked Julius cunningly. "The law can't touch me."

"My poor fellow, there are other kin's of laws where you are going," Nikolai answered. And even as the words left his lips the came a roaring sound, a spurt of flame, and the afterhatch disappeared in a geyser of fire.

"All hands man the boats!" roared the captain; fifty sailors sprang forward and began to swing the boats free from their lashings. There was a universal cry; men started forward; the officers drew their revolvers and the cowardly sunk back again.

"Let him keep his stones," said Mary with quiet contempt. "I have no need for that sort of restitution."

"But if he gives them freely—" began Nikolai.

"I will not take his gifts."

"But if he barter them or sells them to you—"

Mary looked at him doubtfully. A lane was formed in front of us and the women were passing into the boat. The men followed. The millionaire, Van Aam, Mary and I found ourselves together in the bow. It began to de-

scend. Julius, reduced to a cowering heap of fear, crouched against the gunwale. I remember seeing the sea heave toward us—and then—

We were all in the water, and at the same instant every porthole became ablaze. The fire had reached the cargo, which consisted largely of sulphur and nitre. A violent explosion followed. Whether this or the fall stunned me I do not know, but I opened my eyes to see, high over my head, the lifeboat hanging by one rope from the side of the sinking ship, while close at my side swam Nikolai, supporting Mary. I understood what happened immediately. The ropes had refused to work; one had broken, and all had been swung into the water. I must have been swimming for some time before recovering consciousness, for all this passed through my brain as some horrible moving picture play. When I regained full possession of my faculties I found myself clinging to a small water-cask that floated at my side, tossing like a cork upon the waves. The ship had disappeared and under the light of the stars the sea looked inky black and void of life. Had all except myself perished? As the thought flashed through my mind I heard myself halted, and, looking round saw Nikolai, not twelve feet away, clinging to the side of an empty lifeboat, one arm supporting Mary.

"Swim to the other side and climb in while I steady her," he called.

I struck out with the cask, climbed in with difficulty and landed in the cask after me. Then I helped Nikolai in with the half-conscious girl. The oars were still in the boat, but the provisions were gone; evidently this was the one that had broken loose

tapping the fat millionaire upon the shoulder, "all the eggs you are likely to get during the next few weeks are turtles' eggs—raw."

"Ain't you got any food?" asked Julius, bewildered.

"Take up that oar and pull, or we'll toss you overboard," shouted Nikolai savagely.

The millionaire attempted to obey. But his flabby hands could hardly hold the handle, and Van Aam snatched it from him impatiently and gave it to Miss Boyd. She pulled bravely, and soon we began to draw nearer to the shore. After several hours of work under a burning sun we beached the boat upon a shore of dense and impenetrable jungle.

"And now to make a camp," said Nikolai. He had taken command as if by right, and no one questioned him. He assigned Van Aam to gather wood from the jungle—happily I had a silver box full of matches which had escaped wetting; to myself he gave the task of gathering turtles' eggs from the shore; he announced his intention of ascending a peak which was visible some miles away through the jungle in order to investigate our surroundings. It was generally agreed that we must have landed upon one of the uninhabited and inhospitable Caymans.

I was lucky in my search and came back with several turtles' eggs; I also discovered a pelican colony and located several nests of young. These would serve us at a pinch, though the flesh would be as unpleasant as that of most sea-birds.

When I returned I found the fire merrily blazing and Mary in charge of the camp. Sir Julius lay stretched out on his back groaning. Nikolai,

at his neck where hung the chamois bag suspended from the cord.

"You don't get anything," he shouted. "That's a nice trick to play on a man. Because I've got a few precious stones—"

"I want nothing," said Nikolai. "Miss Boyd is the hostess here. Diamonds are nothing but crystallized carbon. As you are aware, Sir Julius, they have no intrinsic value apart from their relation to other commodities. In Maiden Lane or Kimberly they bring good prices; here they are worth exactly one turtle's egg for the smaller ones and one turtle's egg and a drink of water for the finer stones."

Sir Julius detached the bag and picked out a tiny stone.

"Here! Give me a turtle's egg," he snarled.

Nikolai picked out the smallest egg and handed it to the millionaire with a bow. While Sir Julius devoured it greedily, Nikolai turned the diamond over to Miss Boyd.

"We have a new boarder," he said. "Please accept his meal ticket in advance."

Mary took the diamond with a smile. When the millionaire had concluded his meal he bought a drink with another stone.

"How many more have you?" asked Van Aam, laughing.

"Twenty-four," answered Sir Julius with a snarl.

"Three a day," mused Van Aam, "and one for lodging—unless Sir Julius prefers to sleep outside the campfire among the raccoons. That will last six days. Perhaps by that time we shall find some manner of reaching a more hospitable shore."

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"Well," said Van Aam, "the secret will keep six days, won't it?"

That night Sir Julius paid out another diamond for his lodging, and his raucous snoring, interspersed with groans as he tossed from side to side upon the stony ground, kept most of us awake until the sun rose.

We exacted a tribute in advance that day, and when Sir Julius in a last attempt to save his gems offered to work for his living, we sent him off for turtles' eggs. We watched him wander off into the jungle and peer into the trees; that effort was too much for him, and thereafter he lay at home in sullen silence while we went off on our expedition.

But not to gather turtles' eggs. At evening Van Aam and Nikolai disappeared, returning on the following morning when the sun was well up over the trees. They called to Mary and myself to follow them, and, leaving the millionaire sitting despairingly beneath the thorn shrubs, we hastened to a tiny glade beside a trickling rivulet, where we found spread out upon the grass a first-class banquet.

There was a ham, two loaves of fresh bread, a pound of butter, clean napkins, and, to crown all, a bottle of champagne.

"Fall to, fall to," said Van Aam, inviting us to the feast. "When you are satisfied the mystery shall be entirely explained."

Even our curiosity could not overcome our hunger. Two days' diet of turtles' eggs had sickened us of that staple food for all time. When, at last, we laid our napkins aside we rose and followed our companions through a narrow path in the jungle.

A mile ahead we emerged into a clearing; we heard the sound of the sea; and all at once, rounding a promontory, there appeared before our astonished gaze—

"My little hotel—my latest investment," said Van Aam proudly, pointing to an immense five-story erection, covering some half an acre, set in the middle of spacious grounds.

"Then we are—" I gasped.

"Shipwrecked off the Georgia coast, as I had suspected. And provisionally upon the very island where I have laid out my latest summer resort. We open in a week; you gentlemen, and you, Miss Boyd, must be my guests throughout the season."

"Oh, I can't," said Mary, blushing.

"I have—I've an engagement in Savannah."

"Young woman," said Van Aam sternly, "this is called Honeycomb House and is built specially with a view to the requirements of elopers."

"But I'm not going to elope," pleaded Mary.

"We'll take you all the same," said Van Aam magnanimously. "But say—do you think you could endure another four days in camp if I hide a pillow and some blankets for you and bring you out to lunch every day under the trees? It's worth it—for the diamond necklace."

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Home Town Helps

ADMITS RIGHTS OF CITIES

English Parliamentary Committee Refuses to Allow Disfigurement by Railways.

It is a matter for more than congratulation, says the *Town Planning Review*, published in Liverpool, England, that the Northern Junction railway came to grief before the parliamentary committee. The project failed because of the strenuous opposition that was aroused. The particular interest which attaches itself to the defeat of the railway was not merely the triumph of the Hampstead Garden suburb and the Finchley town planning scheme.

It is the first time that the new age of transit has demonstrated that there are considerations of pressing importance other than railways. The vast importance of the road to the modern city confronted the railway promoters with unexpected difficulties.

The consideration due to town planning schemes, embodying traffic arteries suitable for the requirements of the immediate future, also influenced the decision of the parliamentary committee.

The railway promoters had to realize that the precedents of the nineteenth century, insisting on every other public utility or amenity being made subservient to the interest of railways, proved to be no longer tenable. The defeat of the bill has, in fact, borne home to all the companies that a similar failure is likely to overtake all those other enterprises which, without regard to modern conditions, seek to perpetuate and repeat on the confines of the modern city the disastrous blunders, the inconvenience and blatant ugliness which characterized the efforts of railway engineers in the past century.

Under this title the state forester of California has issued a booklet that fairly teems with useful and usable information, says the *Los Angeles Times*. The best trees for the various sections of the state are described, all illustrated and their relative usefulness discussed for soil and rural conditions, in relation to soils, climates, general conditions and environments. The various injurious insects and tree diseases are given attention, also treatment of wounds, burns and all classes of injuries, making a wonderfully complete treatise of a very live and important subject, a booklet by the way, that should be in the hands of every tree-lover in the state. The author is Ben Y. Morrison, who for years has made a special study of California trees as found along our streets and highways, and is, further and beyond all this a trained and educated forester.

Boosts Garden City Idea.

The garden city movement in this country is growing rapidly, and let us hope substantially, says the *Construction News*. About New York city this idea has been carried out admirably, and the suggestion now comes from New England that an attempt will be made to obtain 1,000 acres of land for a garden city near Boston. One of the speakers at the convention of the National Forward to the Land League in Boston stated the other day that there were 5,000,000 acres of waste land in Massachusetts, much of which was well adapted to development of this character. Aside from the semi-philanthropic idea involved, it means a great deal of money to some enterprising man who is big and strong enough to carry through this idea in the right way.

Appearance of Streets.

The cleanliness, the neatness, the beauty of streets and sidewalks are influences in behalf of good order and exalted citizenship that are more powerful than prisons or parks. What a city really is, is told by the character of her streets—not her high or broad streets, so much as the streets out where the population lives. What a city government amounts to is in establishing the character of a city is more reflected in the gutters and crossings than the proud parade on the public occasions. A foul or dirty street, a bad and dangerous sidewalk, a gutter of standing, muddy water destroy civic pride and undermine a true citizenship.—Columbus (O.) State Journal.

Model English Town.

Burnville is one of England's model towns. It was developed along scientific lines by the Garden Cities and Town Planning association of London. The association went to great pains to make the place perfect in every respect, in order to show the benefits of well planned cities and towns. It is claimed to be the most healthful and cheerful place in England. There are 925 houses in the model town. Not more than nine houses are built on an acre. Kingley road, which is reproduced here, gives an idea of the place.

Easing a Tight Shoe.

To ease a shoe that pinches, dip a cloth in very hot water, wring it out and place it over the spot where it pinches. Repeat this as soon as the cloth becomes cold. A few applications and the softened leather becomes stretched to the comfort of the foot.

Unless Somebody Starts Fashion.

A girl who is too short can wear high-heeled shoes, but a girl who is too tall can't go barefooted.—Cincinnati Enquirer.



from the vessel at the moment of the catastrophe. As we sank back exhausted upon the bottom a feeble voice cried to us from over the waters.

We seized the oars and pulled with a will. In a few moments I made out a man clinging to a spar; it was Van Aam, and with one hand he supported the puffing face of Julius.

"I had to stun him to keep him from pulling me under," he whispered as we hoisted him in. "But he was too fat to sink. Now all together!"

We got the millionaire into the boat, but that was our last effort. We drifted to and fro upon the face of the sea until day broke, disclosing a long, flat coast-line not five miles away.

"Sir Julius, who steeled recovering consciousness had been alternately praying and weeping, sat up and pointed.

"Thank God, we're saved; we're off Georgia," he cried.

Van Aam laughed sarcastically. "I wish it were," he said. "That's one of the Caymans, an uninhabited cluster of coral isles covered with jungle. Our troubles are only commencing."

"But we've got food," said the millionaire. "We can signal to passing ships."

Then, looking round, his eye fell upon the water cask.

"Where's breakfast?" he demanded peevishly. "We ain't in devilish hurry, but I'm devilish hungry. Got any eggs?"

"Sir Julius Robinson," said Nikolai,

who returned a few minutes after me, announced that we appeared to have landed upon a large island, and that he had found no trace of water. However, our cask contained enough, for last us, with care, for several days.

We broiled the turtles' eggs and sat down to our unappetizing meal. Then Sir Julius rose with alacrity and stretched out his hand toward the pot.

"Turtles' eggs, hey?" he said sniffling. "Well, they don't look so bad. I'll take the one."

"You'll get breakfast in the morning if you work for it," said Nikolai.

"What?" shrieked Sir Julius, "are you thieves going to leave me to starve? Ain't I one of the party?"

"Sir Julius," said Nikolai with a bow, "you can gather all the turtle's eggs you can find in the morning and have them for yourself—"

"Raw," I interrupted. "The matches belong to me."

"Damn you," snarled the millionaire. "I could buy fifty such puppies as you."

"You can buy your share of the meal," said Nikolai.

The millionaire's features relaxed into a sour smile. "Oh, trying to hold me up, hey?" he said. "Well, I haven't got my checkbook here, but you can charge it up against me. How much a day? Laundry included?"

"One diamond a meal," said Nikolai blandly.

Sir Julius turned livid; he clutched

at his neck where hung the chamois bag suspended from the cord.

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